



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM NEXT.IO: TRENDS, CONVERSATIONS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1) Prediction markets are reshaping and destabilizing the ecosystem.

- Prediction markets dominated the discussion, viewed as both a transformational innovation and a regulatory gray area.
- There is deep uncertainty about legal outcomes, including potential federal oversight or court rulings.
- Traditional operators are entering the space, while startups seek regulatory pathways (e.g., CFTC approval).

Implication: The convergence of gambling, financial trading, and speculative behavior poses new responsible-gaming risks.

2) Regulatory fragmentation remains the defining U.S. challenge.

- The U.S. market continues to evolve under inconsistent, state-by-state frameworks.
- Emerging formats (prediction markets, sweepstakes, social casino) often operate outside traditional regulatory structures.

Implication: Consumer protections are uneven, creating gaps in safeguards and accountability.

3) New gaming verticals are expanding faster than policy frameworks

- Rapid growth in social casino, sweepstakes, and skill-based gaming signals a shift in how consumers engage.
- Debate continues over whether these models are temporary workarounds or long-term industry shifts.

Implication: Many of these products blur lines between gaming and gambling, complicating harm prevention.

4) Technology (especially AI) is transforming both growth and protection

- Operators are investing in AI, payments innovation, and scalable infrastructure.
- AI is also being discussed for responsible gaming interventions and monitoring.

Implication: Technology is a double-edged sword, accelerating engagement while offering tools for early risk detection.

5) Product innovation is outpacing product maturity.

- Even high-growth sectors like prediction markets face product quality and sustainability challenges.
- M&A and vertical integration are expected to improve offerings.

Implication: Rapid scaling may outstrip safeguards, increasing exposure to consumer harm.

6) The industry is converging around “speculative entertainment.”

- Demand, especially among younger users, is shifting toward interactive, speculative, always-on experiences.

Implication: This convergence increases intensity, frequency, and accessibility of play-key risk factors.

REFLECTION BY MICHAEL SOLL

I recently had the opportunity to engage with industry leaders, regulators, and innovators at the NEXT.io Summit in New York.

The conversations were both energizing and sobering, reinforcing the pace of our industry's evolution and the urgency with which responsible gaming must keep pace.

Several themes stood out.

First, the emergence of prediction markets signals a fundamental shift in how consumers engage with risk. These products sit at the intersection of financial trading and gambling, and while their ultimate regulatory classification remains uncertain, their behavioral dynamics are not. They introduce new forms of speculative engagement that demand closer study, particularly as they appeal to younger and more digitally native audiences.

Second, the continued fragmentation of the U.S. regulatory landscape is creating uneven consumer protections. As new verticals such as sweepstakes platforms, social casinos, and skill-based gaming expand, many operate outside traditional regulatory frameworks. This reality challenges us to think beyond jurisdictional boundaries and toward more consistent, evidence-based standards of player protection.

Third, technology is rapidly redefining both opportunity and risk. Artificial intelligence and advanced data systems are enabling highly personalized user experiences, but they also offer powerful tools for early identification of problematic play. The question before us is not whether these tools will be used, but how intentionally and effectively they will be deployed in the service of player well-being.

Finally, one overarching trend is clear: the industry is converging toward more immersive, continuous, and speculative forms of entertainment.

For those of us in the responsible gaming community, these developments are a call to action.

We must accelerate research into emerging products and player behaviors.

We must strengthen collaboration across sectors, including regulators, operators, and technology providers.

And we must ensure that innovation in gaming is matched, if not exceeded, by innovation in player protection.

The future of this industry will not be defined solely by growth, but by how responsibly that growth is managed.

Sincerely,
Michael Soll
President